

THE PRINCIPLES AND DUTY OF PROTESTANT
 DISSENTERS CONSIDERED,
 IN A
S E R M O N
 PREACHED AT THE
O R D I N A T I O N
 O F
 THE REV. JOHN PRIOR ESTLIN,
 AT LEWIN'S MEAD, BRISTOL, AUGUST 5, 1778,
 BY THE REV. WILLIAM ENFIELD, LL.D.
 WITH AN
 ADDRESS ON THE DESIGN OF ORDINATION,
 BY THE REV. THOMAS WRIGHT;
 MR. ESTLIN'S ANSWERS
 TO THE QUESTIONS PROPOSED TO HIM;
 AND A
C H A R G E,
 BY THE REV. NATHANIEL WHITE.

L O N D O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE principal Inducement for publishing this Ordination-Service, is the Request of the respectable Society, before whom it was delivered. It is, however, hoped, that the publication will not be thought unseasonable, and that it may be of use, to remind Christian Ministers and People, in general, of their mutual duties, and to engage Protestant Dissenters, in particular, to a manly and spirited attention to their common Interests.

The Author of the Sermon is sensible that his subject merited, especially at the present time, a more full and minute discussion than the usual limits of a pulpit-discourse would admit of; and begs leave to refer his readers, for a more particular account of the principles and character of Dissenters, both with respect to religion and civil government, to Dr. PRIESTLEY's View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters.

A

S E R M O N.

I PETER ii. 17.

LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD.

TO apply the speculations of philosophy to the regulation of human life and manners, is no easy task.

The theories which are formed in the closets of the studious, are commonly of so refined and abstracted a nature, and so remote from the general feelings and experience of mankind, as to be above the comprehension of the multitude, and of little use in practice.

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THE modern doctrine respecting universal benevolence, that it is our duty to lose all inferior attachments in a regard to the general good, and to suppress the feelings of self-love, domestic affection, friendship and patriotism, in order to leave full scope for the exertion of the superior and more enlarged principle of philanthropy; however rational and sublime it may appear in speculation, is by no means adapted to the ideas and capacities of the generality of mankind, and perhaps will be found, upon examination, inconsistent with the present condition of our being.

IN a mind capable of grasping at one survey the whole extent of the universe, and of observing at the same instant, not only the several species of percipient beings, but the nature and circumstances of each individual, the emotions and affections of benevolence may be supposed at once to operate without limitation or restraint towards every being capable of happiness. But, since it is impossible that any passion can be excited but by some object distinctly perceived; man, whose
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senses and imagination are extremely limited in their operations, can only exercise the feelings of benevolence towards those few objects, which either come under his immediate notice, or are made visible to his mind by the power of fancy. Every attempt to extend the benevolent affections of the human heart beyond these bounds, is a fruitless effort to step beyond the prescribed limits of our nature.

WHEN we speak of self-love, as implying the desire of objects capable of affording us the perceptions of enjoyment ; of natural affection, as it appears in the instinctive bond of union between the parent and the child ; of friendship and love, as they subsist between individuals of the human species, or of patriotism, as it prompts men to employ themselves with heroic ardor in defence of their country ; we have distinct ideas of several emotions and passions, which rise in the breast, and become immediate springs of action. But when we consider love as directed towards the whole human race, and still more when we consider it as exercised upon

a universe of beings, we perceive that, for want of a distinct object, every degree of passion or emotion is lost in a tranquil contemplation of the happiness of the creation, and in a moral conviction of our obligations to extend our beneficent offices as far as we are able—principles, which in the present state of human nature, are incapable of operating with sufficient force, to bring the virtues of social life to their full maturity.

HENCE it appears, that those who have depreciated the moral merit of those benevolent affections which are directed to particular objects, and represented it as the consummation of virtue, to which christianity is intended to conduct us, to rise above the tender partialities and warm attachments which usually take place in society, have formed a system of morals inconsistent with the constitution of human nature, and consequently with true philosophy. Though it be indisputably true, that universal benevolence is a virtue, and a virtue of the highest order; it is by no means a virtue inconsistent with those generous affections which are more
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limited in their objects. To substitute this principle in the place of "the dear charities of father, brother, friend," would not only be to deprive us of many of the sweetest pleasures of life, but to destroy some of the most fruitful sources of whatever is amiable, respectable, and useful in human characters.

ON the ground of these remarks, I venture without hesitation to reject as destitute of all foundation in reason and nature, the doctrine of those modern refiners in morals and theology who admit "no habit or action into their roll of virtues which has not for its object the universal welfare of mankind, independent of, and even contrary to, all the partial attachments to individuals, which are formed from the ties of blood, neighbourhood, friendship, opinion and country:"* and I think myself fully justified in understanding the apostolic precept, "Love the brotherhood," and others of a similar nature,

* SEE Dr. Cooper's Sermon on the Three Principal Revelations, preached at Cambridge, and Jenyns on the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion.

in their most plain and obvious sense, as enjoining the free exercise of the benevolent affections among christian brethren ; and, by a parity of reasoning, as inculcating a friendly attachment to each other, and a zealous attention to their common interests, upon all those, among whom the profession of the same general principles of religion has formed a natural bond of union.

I SHALL therefore, without farther apology, consider the exhortation, “ Love the brotherhood,” as applicable to that distinct body of christians, of which we profess ourselves members, and which is known by the appellation of Protestant Dissenters : and shall, in the sequel, briefly unfold those common principles which ought to be regarded as the ground of a general alliance amongst us, and explain the nature and obligations of the duties which belong to the *Protestant Dissenter* as such.

AMIDST the diversity of opinions and tastes which have prevailed among Protestant Dissenters, from their first separation from the established

established church to this day, it would perhaps be in vain to search for any one principle, which all have admitted as the common ground of dissent, and the common bond of union. Different views of the nature and extent of religious liberty, and different ideas of the christian system, have unavoidably produced, among the several sects of Dissenters, a considerable diversity in the motives which have occasioned their separation.

THE first Puritans and Nonconformists seem in general to have had very obscure and contracted ideas concerning the right of private judgment, and little inclination to depart from the popular system of religious faith. They seem to have separated from the Church of England, rather from a dislike to its rites and ceremonies, and from an aversion (perhaps too hastily admitted and indulged beyond reasonable bounds) to every address to the senses or imagination in the forms of religion, than from enlarged principles of toleration, or a liberal spirit of inquiry.

MODERN Dissenters, especially those who
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have

have adopted what are usually called free opinions, have deserted this ground, as either wholly untenable, or not in itself of sufficient strength to support their cause; and have chosen to rest it chiefly on the natural right which every man possesses, of framing his system of religious faith, and choosing his form of religious worship for himself—a right which in their opinion cannot be given up into the hands of the civil magistrate, without betraying the cause of truth and religion.

MANY have carried this point so far as to assert, that the civil power ought in no case whatever to interpose in religious concerns, and that every kind of religious establishment is inconsistent with the nature of religion and unfriendly to its interests. They have maintained—and as far as experience is to determine the question, not without the appearance of truth—that “all establishments of particular systems of faith, with civil emoluments annexed, do inconceivable mischief, by turning religion into a trade, by engendering strife and persecution, by forming hypocrites, by obstructing the progress of truth, and fettering
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and perverting the human mind.”* But others are of opinion, that the prosperity of civil society depends so much upon the prevalence of religious principles, that it is an object of great importance in civil government to provide for their encouragement and support; that this may be done most effectually, by giving the sanction of authority to some one form of religion, at the same time allowing unlimited toleration to every other; and that it would not be difficult to frame a public religious institution on so liberal and comprehensive a plan, as to avoid most of the inconveniences which have hitherto attended establishments. All Dissenters, however, who are such from principle, whatever opinion they entertain concerning the utility of a national establishment, are agreed in acknowledging the right of every individual to judge and act for himself in matters of religion; and in asserting the obligation of civil governors to protect their subjects in the enjoyment of this natural and unalienable right, while they do not so far abuse their liberty, as to employ it

* PRICE'S Observations on Civil Liberty, Preface, p. 15. Note.

in invading the peace and good order of the community.

ON this ground we claim a right of examining, with decent freedom, the established form of religion. In the course of this examination we meet with many particulars, which not only lie open to censure from the critic and the philosopher — in things of this kind it would be easy to acquiesce, where the general taste must be consulted, and the general good is the object — but which are directly contrary to our most obvious and clearly established principles of religion, and inconsistent with our fundamental ideas concerning the worship due to the Supreme Being. While these essential defects remain, we think ourselves justified in peaceably separating from the established church, and adopting a form of religion more agreeable to our own views, and consequently, with respect to us at least, better adapted to answer the ends of moral and religious improvement.

IN doing this, we would by no means be understood to censure those, who, on any principles

ciples which appear satisfactory to their own minds, profess the public system of faith, and adhere to the established forms of worship. We only claim for ourselves that liberty, which we are heartily disposed to allow in its full extent to others. And while the causes of our separation are suffered to continue, we will presume, that the more judicious and candid even of the church from which we separate will not think us deserving of censure; we will assure ourselves, that we shall be justified not only to our own minds, but to the world, if with such important common interests to support, we maintain a mutual attachment, and “love the brotherhood.”

THERE is one point of view in which the cause of Protestant Dissenters must, I think, appear respectable to all good men; I mean as it is favourable to the unrestrained investigation, and the undisguised profession of the truth. Perhaps it would be difficult to erect an establishment on so broad a base, as not to lay some discouraging restrictions upon free inquiry, and cast some temptation in the way
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of its members to give their own judgment a particular bias, or to conceal their real opinions from the public eye : at least this has always been the case in every religious establishment hitherto formed. But, among Dissenters, whose fundamental principle is the right of private judgment, it would be a shameful inconsistency, if every restraint were not removed, — if all possible encouragement were not given to the free discussion of every important subject in religion and morals. It is therefore reasonable, at least in theory, to expect that among them prejudice and bigotry should meet with no quarter, and knowledge should make an easy and rapid progress. It may fairly be expected that Protestant Dissenters should be distinguished by rational opinions, manly views, and generous principles. And, though some disagreeable facts contradict these probable expectations, their general body may, I trust, deservedly be considered as friends to free inquiry, and their common cause as intimately connected with that of science and truth, and consequently
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with the improvement and happiness of mankind.

THAT liberal spirit of inquiry which is the natural result of our principles as Protestant Dissenters, is of peculiar importance to the support and propagation of genuine Christianity. It has been for want of this spirit, that the rational and divine institution of religion established by Jesus Christ the great Teacher sent from God, was so early debased by foreign mixtures; and that so many of the corruptions which ignorance and superstition have from time to time introduced into the christian system, have been suffered to remain. To correct these errors, and restore christianity to its original simplicity, and hereby render it in the highest degree beneficial to mankind, is a laudable and glorious design: it is a design, in the accomplishment of which christians of every denomination ought heartily to unite. We may however expect that it will be undertaken with the greatest ardor, and pursued with the fairest prospect of success, by those who disclaiming all human authority in religious faith, can judge and speak with perfect

perfect freedom on subjects of doubtful speculation. And from the judicious and successful attempts which have already been made for this purpose by the advocates of our holy religion, we are encouraged to expect, that its true nature and spirit will in time be universally understood, and that, notwithstanding all the opposition which interested priests and ignorant bigots are daily making to the progress of the truth as it is in Jesus, the time will come when "pure religion and undefiled" shall every where prevail.

WE have then, my brethren, two grand objects of attention as Protestant Dissenters, the support of the right of private judgment, and the advancement of moral and religious knowledge in the world. Amidst all the diversity of our opinions on subjects of speculation, these important objects ought to form an inseparable bond of union amongst us, and engage us to a zealous attention to our common interests, and a warm attachment to each other as brethren.

It is an interesting topic of inquiry, to what
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causes it has been owing, that these objects have of late been so much disregarded—that, notwithstanding the interesting nature and manifest obligations of our principles, a spirit of indifference to our common cause has been so prevalent amongst us? Whence is it that we so often see Dissenters growing ashamed of the alliance into which they have been thrown by birth and education; treating with disrespect the little flock to which they belong; contributing with a sparing and reluctant hand to the support of the public offices of religion among them, and at last relinquishing a connexion, which they have found, or fancied, to be disreputable and unprofitable?

THE explanation which such persons would probably give of the principles of their own conduct is, that they have been so fortunate as to acquire a liberal turn of mind, which has raised them above the prejudices of education, and enabled them to regard all religious sects with equal indifference, as alike the offspring of ignorance and bigotry. But possibly it may be found upon examination, that all this fair appearance of freedom and candour, is nothing more

more than that indifference which is the natural effect of inattention. Perhaps the only reason why they are not steady and zealous Dissenters is, that they are unacquainted with the true nature and obligation of the principles of dissent. At least this is no very improbable supposition. For among sectaries of all kinds, there are not a few who, having never examined either the general grounds of dissent, or the particular tenets of the sect to which they belong, are Dissenters, and Dissenters of this or that persuasion, for the same reason for which they might have belonged to any sect or any church under heaven—because their fathers were of the same profession before them. Perhaps in some instances we shall find reason to suspect, that their indifference originates in still worse principles; and that, far from being actuated by a spirit of moderation and catholicism, or by that rational conviction which is the result of free inquiry, they are induced to neglect and desert the cause which their ancestors supported, merely from motives of avarice, or vanity.

MODERATION is an excellent quality. Among

mong creatures so fallible and ignorant as we are, it is a virtue of the most important use. I shall not be suspected of intending to depreciate the value, or to recommend any principle inconsistent with the exercise, of this christian spirit. But let us not so far mistake the nature of this virtue as to substitute in its stead that torpid languor, and spiritless indifference, which indicate the want of all settled principles, and are destructive of all vigorous exertions. In order to avoid an illiberal and bigotted attachment to a system, it is by no means necessary that we should have none at all. A man may have principles of his own, at the same time that he allows others the free enjoyment and profession of theirs. It is perfectly consistent with that moderation which requires us to treat those who differ from us in religious opinions with candour and kindness, that we should deliberately choose, and steadily adhere to that form of religion, which appears to us most rational and useful. To do otherwise, would be to sacrifice our own benefit, in the most important concerns, to a timid and cowardly spirit of compliance.

If then we are convinced, upon full inquiry, that the general principles on which we dissent from the established church are rational in themselves, and of sufficient moment to justify our separation, let us not, from false ideas of moderation and catholicism, restrain those natural feelings which would incline us to exert ourselves with vigour in support of our common cause. We may entertain the most candid sentiments towards the members of the established church, and form the highest ideas of the merit of individuals in that church, in perfect consistency with a steady attachment to the dissenting interest. If our principles be just, and our cause good, let us not then be ashamed of the one or the other; but boldly appear in their defence, without fear of incurring the ridicule of the unprincipled, or the censures of bigots: for "it is good always to be zealously affected in a good thing."

THE right which as Protestant Dissenters we claim, of freely forming our judgment, and declaring our opinion on subjects of religion, and of worshipping our Maker in a manner agreeable to the conviction of our own minds,
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is so evidently founded on reason, and so perfectly consistent with the peace of society, and all the great ends of civil government; that whatever opposition our claims may at present meet with, we trust their equity will in time be universally acknowledged. If a timid apprehension of the danger of innovations, or ignorance of the true character of Dissenters as loyal subjects and good citizens, hath hitherto prevented the success of our application for the removal of restrictions which have as little foundation in sound policy as in the true principles of religion; we will not despair, that the wisdom and equity of government, and the free spirit of the times will at length prevail over the prejudices of ignorance and bigotry, and will compleat the work which has been of late begun in favour of our brethren of the Roman Catholic persuasion,* by granting to all denominations of christians,

* THIS sermon was delivered before the author was informed of the rejection of the clause respecting Protestant Dissenters in the late Irish Bill in favour of Roman Catholics.

and to all religious societies whatsoever, the protection and benefit of unlimited toleration.

BUT let us be careful, my brethren, not to retard the progress of this liberal spirit, or delay the completion of this great design, by indulging mutual suspicions and jealousies among ourselves, and shewing that spirit of intolerance towards one another, of which we all so bitterly complain when it falls upon ourselves. It is the unavoidable consequence of freedom of inquiry, on subjects of a doubtful nature, that there must be diversity of opinions. Diversity of opinions—though to be lamented as an indication of human weakness and fallibility—regarded as a proof of the gradual advancement of knowledge and liberty, is a just occasion of triumph: for, in the present state of human nature, uniformity of faith can only be the offspring of ignorance, or of hypocrisy. The thing to be regretted is, not that we differ in opinion, but that every man cannot see, what methinks is evident beyond all possibility of dispute, that just as much as my neighbour differs from me in opinion, so much I differ from him; and
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consequently, that whatever reason I have to expect that he should tolerate my opinion, he has the same reason to expect that I should tolerate his. Happy would it be for the world, if from a full conviction of the truth of this plain maxim, Calvinists and Arminians, Arians and Socinians, and all the several classes into which controversy hath divided the Christian Church, would agree to shew that they "love the brotherhood," by allowing each other the most unbounded indulgence in their religious forms and speculations.

It is, moreover, an essential part of our duty as Protestant Dissenters, in which both ministers and people are equally concerned, to make an unreserved use of the right of private judgment. The only way in which we can give genuine distinction and dignity to the character of a Dissenter, is by boldly standing forth as the friends of free inquiry. The teachers of religion amongst us should diligently employ themselves in those researches which are most likely to rescue us from the bondage of error and prejudice, and

lead us to the knowledge and discovery of important truths. Our hearers likewise should give us the most unlimited encouragement to communicate the result of our inquiries ; and should liberally encourage every design which is friendly to the advancement of knowledge, virtue and religion.

It is much to our discredit, as Protestant Dissenters, that we so commonly suffer the prejudices of education, and the authority of custom, to have nearly the same power in binding us down to certain opinions and forms, as if they were established by law. If we would act consistently with our principles, and enjoy the benefit of them in their full extent, we ought to be as ready to receive any new truth, or to introduce any advantageous change into our public forms of devotion, as we should be to adopt any improvement in affairs of philosophy, commerce, or policy. Why are we zealous to maintain and perpetuate our religious liberty, if we have not the good sense, or the courage, to make use of it? If we are already perfect, what can we do better than to form our present religious

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ous system into an establishment? If we are not, let us not act so inconsistently with our principles, as through fear of innovation to refuse improvement; but let us in this instance, as in all others, go on towards perfection.

TO CONCLUDE; Since the great end of all religion is to make men virtuous and useful in this world, and prepare them for happiness hereafter, let us carefully improve the advantages which our religious profession affords us for establishing our minds in the habits of virtue and piety. In order to distinguish ourselves as Protestant Dissenters, it is not necessary that we should imitate the rigid manners of our forefathers. Their forbidding singularities were of no other use, that I am able to discover, than to subject them to unnecessary mortification and ridicule. Puritanical formality and gloominess of aspect, an affected preciseness of behaviour, and a rigorous abstinence from innocent pleasures, are distinctions no longer expected from us. But, my brethren, there are distinguishing characteristics, naturally arising from our

religious principles, which it much concerns us, both for the credit of our profession and for our own personal honour and advantage, that we religiously maintain. If, in consequence of the simplicity of our worship, we learn that simplicity of manners which will preserve us untainted by the vices of the age in which we live;—If we improve our opportunities and advantages for the attainment of religious knowledge, in establishing such settled principles of wisdom and virtue as shall become the ground of a manly and useful character;—If while we avoid the follies of superstition and the extravagancies of enthusiasm, we likewise preserve ourselves free from the frivolous levities, or the despicable excesses of those, who living without settled principles, are the dupes of fashion or the slaves of appetite;—If we apply our speculations to the regulation of our manners, and whilst we are ambitious to be distinguished by the correctness and solidity of our ideas on moral and religious subjects, are equally careful to distinguish ourselves by adhering to the most refined principles of honour in our transactions with our brethren, by exercising the most
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active and disinterested benevolence, and finally, by maintaining a general elevation and dignity of sentiment and character ; we shall give the world indubitable proofs of the excellence of our principles, reflect the most substantial honour upon our profession, promote the interests of truth and virtue in the world, and prepare ourselves for receiving a glorious and everlasting recompense in the kingdom of heaven : Which may God of his infinite mercy grant ! Amen.

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A D D R E S S

ON THE DESIGN OF

· O R D I N A T I O N ,

BY THE REV. THOMAS WRIGHT:

WITH

MR. ESTLIN'S ANSWERS

TO THE

QUESTIONS PROPOSED TO HIM.

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS!

PROTESTANT Dissenting Ministers make no pretensions to a power of communicating ministerial endowments. They are fully satisfied, that qualifications of this nature are the gifts of God, bestowed, not as they were in the Apostles' days, in an extraordinary and instantaneous manner, by the miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost, but gradually in the course of his providence and by the ordinary influence of his spirit.

NEITHER do they assume authority to invest any with a *right* of exercising the ministry. Whoever is qualified and inclined, hath a
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commission to preach the gospel, from him who only can grant one. And when a society of christians invite such a person to be their *pastor* or *teacher*, and he consents, no power on earth can justly exclude him from that character; nor is any thing more, necessary to his performing all the duties of it. Those of them, therefore, who use *imposition of hands* in services of this nature, do it in compliance with *ancient custom*; and generally represent it as a *sign* to point out the persons who are solemnly devoting themselves to the ministry, and to signify their approbation of them. But as there is no occasion for it to point them out to God (and the ceremony is used in prayer) so with respect to men, those ends may be answered better by other means.

It is observable, that in most, if not all the instances mentioned in the new testament of the imposition of hands upon ministers, there was some divine interposition, particularly 1 Tim. iv. 14. Paul saith to the *Evangelist*; *neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by promise, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*; which is the only place

place where the *presbytery* is said to have laid on hands. And as the generality of those christians, who practise this ceremony in the present age, pretend to communicate very great gifts and powers, even *the Holy Ghost*, with authority to absolve men from sin, which all Protestant Dissenters look upon as not only entirely groundless, but exceedingly dangerous; and since it may be feared, that the idea of something *extraordinary* is excited in the minds of common christians when used among us; several judicious persons have thought it prudent to lay it aside: as every thing, not enjoined by Divine Authority certainly should be, when it becomes the means of countenancing superstition, or producing any bad effect, or cannot be observed with propriety. On which accounts, several things practised in the primitive times are now generally omitted by christians; as *anointing the sick with oil* which the *presbyters* are required to do, Jam. v. 14. And *saluting each other* in places of public worship, with a *kiss*, which the Apostles recommend, if not expressly injoin, Rom. xvi. 16. 1 Theff. v. 26. 1 Pet. v. 14, &c. And Justin Martyr, who flourished

rished about the middle of the second century, tells us, was practised in his time. Now if christians make no scruple of laying aside these ceremonies, because they are no longer useful or decent, why should they continue imposition of hands, which doth not appear ever to have been enjoined or actually used before the third century, in appointing men to the *episcopal* or *pastoral* office, and hath been notoriously abused to superstitious purposes.—In this sentiment, I am happy to find the generality of my brethren, whom I have consulted on this occasion, concur with me.

THE ends *we* have in view in these services, are of a moral nature—as the encouragement of deserving ministers, and christian societies in the discharge of their duties to each other; with the promotion of regularity, harmony, and brotherly love in the churches. And the means, by which these purposes must be accomplished, are of a similar kind, for instance, the solemn engagements of the persons principally concerned, with instructions and exhortations addressed to them by their brethren, and earnest supplications to God.

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AND now, *my dear friend*, permit me to assure you, that we your brethren, who at your desire, are assembled for these purposes, disclaim all dominion over your faith, and are so far from requiring your assent to any articles of religion, of our own or other men's composing, that we do not desire an account of your sentiments on points of divinity, controverted by wise and good men, drawn up even by yourself, before we acknowledge you as a brother in the ministry of the gospel, and recommend you to the blessing of God.

SUCH requisitions appear to us unfriendly to liberty, peace and brotherly love. And we are convinced, that true fellowship will never prevail among christians, until they are *bumble* enough to believe that the scriptures express the doctrines of religion in a manner sufficiently clear and particular, and make *them* the *only* terms of communion; and that till then, the gospel and its Divine Author will not have their due honour.

QUESTION I.

WE are fully satisfied, that you believe
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the Scriptures to contain a just account of the religion of Christ, and will derive your religious instructions from them. But if you think proper publicly to declare this, or any other sentiments, for the satisfaction or edification of this assembly, we shall attend to them with pleasure.

ANSWER.

As I apprehend it would be giving up that liberty wherewith Christ has made me free—the liberty of judging for myself in matters of religion—to acknowledge the authority of any man, or body of men to require my assent to any doctrinal articles of human composition, so I esteem myself peculiarly happy in being informed that both you, Sir, and the rest of my fathers and brethren in the ministry who have favoured me with their countenance upon this occasion, are so far from thinking yourselves authorised to impose your own sentiments upon me, that you “do not desire an account of my opinions on points of divinity, controverted by wise and good men, drawn up even by myself.” A confession of faith,
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extending to all the minute and intricate points of theological debate, would, I am convinced, conduce but little to the information, or improvement of this audience; and from a person who wishes to preserve his mind always open to conviction, and to be ready to resign any of his opinions as soon as they shall appear to him to have no solid foundation in reason or scripture, it would, I conceive, be totally useless and improper. This society, which I have statedly served for more than seven years, cannot for their own satisfaction, stand in need of a particular and circumstantial account of my sentiments on any of the important and practical subjects of religion. To them I can say with truth, that I have always firmly believed every proposition which they have heard from my lips. The rest of mankind I consider as having nothing to do with my religious opinions. Instead therefore of misemploying your time, and diverting the attention of this audience from the more important parts of the present service, by a tedious and formal recital of the several articles that compose my religious system (all of which I can truly assert are the result of a diligent

use of the means of information with which Providence has favoured me) I shall only say as much as appears to me necessary, to clear my character from the suspicion of inconsistency, and sufficient to convince you that, my speculative opinions correspond with my outward profession, and that I am in reality what I appear to be in the eyes of the world.

STANDING here, as I do at present under a peculiar description, and having for some time supported a particular character, the character of a *teacher of religion*, I solemnly declare in the presence of the great searcher of hearts, and before this assembly, that I do most firmly believe the following doctrines of religion. I believe that there hath existed from all eternity, and that there will exist to all eternity, a supreme, intelligent, and immutable being, possessed of all possible excellence and perfection, whom we call GOD. The numerous worlds and systems, which are scattered through the vast extent of infinite space, with all their various inhabitants, together with the different orders of intelligent beings which exist in different parts of the universe,

niverse, I believe, were created by his power, and are supported and preserved by his providence. I avow it as my steadfast persuasion, that the Divine Being exercises a moral government over his rational offspring, and that he will hereafter call all men to a strict account for their conduct, and recompense to every one according to his works.

STANDING here in the capacity of a minister of the *christian* religion, I solemnly acknowledge my firm belief of the divine mission and authority of Jesus Christ, upon the evidence of a series of miracles which he wrought during his life, and the particular fact of his resurrection from the dead: and I publicly declare my cordial and chearful assent to every doctrine which he taught as coming from God. I entertain the highest veneration and respect for the whole christian revelation: I consider it as the greatest blessing which God ever conferred upon mankind. The holy scriptures, I believe, contain a just and faithful account of this dispensation of grace and mercy. As the oracles of divine truth and wisdom I thankfully receive them, and I will, by divine as-

sistance, continue to study them with fidelity and diligence, and make them, and them alone, the rule of my faith, the guide of my conduct, and the foundation of all my hopes and prospects with respect to futurity. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for I consider it as the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

QUESTION III.

As a subject of the greatest importance in itself, I think it suitable to the present occasion, to desire you (which I do with pleasure, being persuaded you can with sincerity assign very laudable ones) to lay before this congregation, the great ends you have in view, and the motives which have had the chief influence in determining you to engage, and now after several years experience, publicly to declare your intention to persevere, in the ministry of the gospel.

ANSWER.

THE least acquaintance with the state and circumstances of that part of the christian church

church to which I have chosen to unite myself, will, I apprehend, preclude all reasonable ground of suspicion, that I was originally influenced in my choice by a regard to worldly riches, pleasure, or power. These objects, Sir, I considered myself as virtually relinquishing, when I entered upon my present profession. From a sense of the weakness of human nature, and the vast importance of cultivating habits of virtue, I always regarded it as a point of wisdom, to place myself in those circumstances, and to make choice of that course of life, in which I should meet with the fewest temptations to a wrong conduct, and the strongest motives and inducements to virtue and obedience. If I know my own heart, the great end which I have ever proposed to myself in exercising the office of a christian minister, is my own moral and intellectual improvement, and the intellectual and moral improvement of others. I consider this as an end, which is of all others, most worthy the attention and pursuit of a reasonable creature, and consequently regard the christian ministry as the most useful, important and honourable employment

in which a human being can possibly be engaged. I am therefore desirous of devoting myself to it in a more public, solemn, and explicit manner than I have ever done before : and I now declare it to be my *present* resolution and purpose, if my health is preserved, and my prospect of usefulness continued, to persevere in this employment to the end of my life.

QUESTION III.

SINCE your requesting us, who have no commission from the civil powers, nor countenance from the church established by law, to assist you by our advice and prayers, when you publicly and solemnly dedicate yourself to the ministry, implies that you chuse to exercise it among Protestants Dissenters : will you please to favour us with some of the reasons, which led you to make, and cause you to adhere to that choice ?

ANSWER.

CALLED upon, as I am with the greatest propriety upon this occasion, to explain the grounds

grounds and reasons of my dissent from the mode of religion established in this country, I consider myself as obliged to declare my sentiments upon this subject with the utmost plainness and sincerity : and I do it with the greater pleasure, as I am convinced that every person of a liberal and candid mind, in whatever light these things may appear to him, will be so far from being offended with me on this account, that he will entertain a more favourable opinion of my character, from a persuasion that my separation from the establishment proceeds solely from a regard to conscience, than if he had reason to impute it merely to the influence of custom or education, or a spirit of perverseness, bigotry, or obstinacy. The grand principle, then, upon which I ground my dissent is this, which I beg leave to lay before you in the words of the late learned and truly liberal Bishop Hoadly, “ That as the *Church* of Christ is the *Kingdom* of Christ, it is essential to it, that Christ himself be the *sole Lawgiver* and *sole Judge* of his subjects, in all points relating to the favour or displeasure of Almighty God ; and that *all his subjects*, in what station soever they may be,

be, are *equally subjects to him*; and that no one of them, any more than another, hath authority either to make new laws for Christ's subjects; or to impose a sense upon the old ones, which is the same thing; or to judge, censure, or punish the servants of another master, in matters relating purely to conscience or salvation."* Considering Christ as the sole lawgiver in his kingdom, and considering the scriptures as containing the only genuine and authentic account of his laws, I cannot avoid assenting to the conclusion, that *the scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice to a christian*. This was the principle, upon which the great Chillingworth justified the separation of the Church of England from the Church of Rome, asserting with truth that *the bible alone is the religion of Protestants*. I avow this principle in its utmost latitude, and consider it of so extensive application, as not only to *justify* but to *require* my dissent, not only from the Church of Rome, but also from the Church of England; and not only

* SEE Hoadly's Sermon on the Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ.

from the Church of England, but from every ecclesiastical establishment in the world which claims an authority to interfere in matters of conscience, and to impose articles of faith. The acknowledgment of this power in any set of men, appears to me to be neither more nor less, than to renounce that allegiance which I owe to Christ, the only lawgiver in his kingdom, and to imply a doubt of the sufficiency of the sacred scriptures alone, as the rule and standard of christian faith, worship, and practice.

I HAVE, moreover, many reasons, which appear to me of great weight, for dissenting from the Church of England, founded upon an inconsistency which, I think, I discover, in its doctrines, constitution, and some of its offices and forms of devotion, with the purity and simplicity of the gospel. To specify these particularly, when I acknowledge at the same time that there are many things in its service which I highly admire, would be a disagreeable and invidious task : if any person is desirous of being acquainted with them, I would refer him to a pamphlet written by the
Rev.

Rev. Mr. Towgood of Exeter, entitled " A calm and plain Answer to the Enquiry, Why are you a Dissenter from the Church of England? or to that gentleman's letters to Mr. White. For these reasons, Sir, which I have faithfully and honestly laid before you, I am obliged in conscience to decline all prospect of the honours and emoluments of the church established by law, to which in the earlier part of my life I had many inducements to attach myself. With the warmest and most affectionate regard for men of virtue and integrity of all denominations, I profess myself a Dissenter, and glory in the appellation.

As an additional inducement to unite myself with this body of Christians, I beg leave further to observe, that I think it highly conducive to the purposes of christian edification, that every society should have a right to choose, and I will add, reject its own ministers; and that every minister should have a right to exercise his own understanding in the pursuit of truth, without being cramped and fettered by human systems and articles of belief. It is, moreover, a consideration of great weight with me, that I am hereby permitted

mitted to make use of those means which I apprehend are most conducive to the purposes of religion, and enjoy that noblest of all species of liberty, the liberty of the *mind*, and appear publicly in behalf of the rights of men and christians.

QUESTION IV.

Do you acknowledge yourself, before God and this christian assembly, under sacred obligations to apply with diligence, to such studies and exercises, as may farther prepare you for the ministry, as well as to the discharge of the duties of it, in the various circumstances in which you are placed,—to maintain an exemplary conversation—to live in harmony with your brethren—in charity with your fellow christians of all denominations, and in good-will towards all mankind?—And if persecution, or temptations of a different nature should arise, are you determined, by divine assistance, to maintain your fidelity to your Lord, by adhering stedfastly to the cause of liberty, truth and pure christianity?

ANS-

ANSWER.

IN consequence of taking upon myself the character of a minister of the christian religion, I solemnly " acknowledge myself, before God and this assembly, under sacred obligations to apply with diligence to such studies and exercises, as may further prepare me for the ministry, as well as to the discharge of the duties of it, in the various circumstances in which I may be placed." It is my sincere and fervent wish, to be instrumental in promoting the best interests of my fellow-creatures, not only by my public instructions, but by the whole tenor of my life and conversation. To this end, I consider myself as bound by the strongest ties, to exercise a proper discipline over my own spirit; to cultivate my moral and intellectual powers; to discharge with fidelity every personal, relative, social and ministerial duty; to guard against even the appearance of evil; and to regulate my whole conduct by the standard of the gospel. It shall ever be my steady endeavour " to maintain an exemplary conversation, and to live in harmony " and friendship with the various

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rious members of this society—"with all my brethren" in the ministry of every denomination, and with all with whom I am in any respect connected. Though I profess myself a Dissenter, and am such from conviction, yet I can say with truth, that I receive as a brother, and cordially esteem, every honest and worthy person of every denomination of christians. The discussion of subjects of controversy I have cautiously avoided in my public discourses, regarding the moral improvement and edification of my hearers, as the great end of my ministerial labours. And though I cannot be indifferent about what appears to me to be the cause of truth and genuine Christianity, yet I declare, I would much rather be the means of curing the disorders of the heart, than correcting the mistakes of the head, and am infinitely more desirous of inculcating a spirit of candour, benevolence, and rational piety, than a zeal for any doctrines of speculation. I consider all truth of importance, only as it is subservient to this end: and though I cannot agree with many of my fellow-christians, for whom I entertain the highest regard, in matters of opinion, I
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am willing to allow them the same liberty of judging for themselves, which I claim for myself; and am desirous of preserving a more close, sacred and tender union with all honest men and sincere christians, than an union of speculative opinions in the bond of an outward profession—a real union of heart and affection in the bond of integrity and benevolence. It shall ever be my study and endeavour to live “in charity with my fellow-christians of all denominations, and in good will towards all mankind.”

AND as I wish, from a consciousness of my own imperfection, to lay myself under the strongest obligations and engagements to a conduct in every respect becoming my profession, I now pledge myself in the most solemn manner to this society, “if persecution, or temptations of a different nature should arise, by divine assistance, to maintain my fidelity to my Lord, by a steady adherence to” what appears to me, to be “the cause of liberty, of truth, and of pure christianity.”

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WITH the deepest impression of the importance of the office I have undertaken, and the difficulty of discharging it with propriety, I earnestly intreat the further advice, directions and prayers, of you my Fathers in the ministry.

I SHALL now take the liberty of addressing myself in a few words to this society, to which I consider myself as standing in the relation of a christian minister. You have been witnesses, my friends, to the solemn and deliberate resolutions which I have made, to perform to the best of my power, the various, important, and truly arduous duties of the ministerial character. You cannot be insensible that, after all, my success depends chiefly upon you. As it is your moral and spiritual edification which is the great end of my labours, and the object which of all others lies nearest my heart, let me intreat you, as the highest obligation which you can confer upon me, to attend with that seriousness and desire of improvement upon the various external means of religion, that this great end may be completely answered, and I may have reason

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to rejoice in being the instrument in the hands of providence of promoting your best, your eternal interests.

For every proof of your candour and friendship, which I have experienced since the commencement of our connexion, I heartily and sincerely thank you. All that I have to ask—all that I can reasonably desire, with respect to myself, is a continuance of the same conduct. Let it be *your* study and endeavour, and I assure you it shall be *mine*, to preserve that mutual harmony and friendship which has hitherto inviolably subsisted between us. Next to seeing the great purpose of my ministry accomplished, in your religious and spiritual improvement, the highest recompence which I desire for the principal attention and labour of my life, and the strongest inducement which can be proposed to excite me to diligence in my profession, is the continued favour and regard of a liberal, candid, judicious, and affectionate people.

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CONCLUSION.

SUCH sentiments and professions, *dear sir*, in connexion with the knowledge they have of your ministerial abilities, and christian conversation, I may venture to assure you, constrain your friends, who have been particularly desired to engage in the service of this day, cordially to embrace you as a brother in the ministry of the gospel, and to give thanks to God on your account; in which, I doubt not, all others employed in the sacred office, will concur with us; as, I am fully convinced, the whole of this assembly will join, in earnestly recommending you and your labours to the divine blessing.

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OF
NATURAL
HISTORY
NEW YORK
1881

THE
CHARGE,

BY THE

REV. NATHANIEL WHITE.

THE
G. H. A. R. G. R.

BY
THOMAS WHITE

MY DEAR BROTHER,

IT is a pleasure to me to be present on this solemn occasion, and it would have been very agreeable to have testified my regard for you by bearing some part in the service of the day; though I must own it is with reluctance I undertake to deliver the Charge, and had I not for many years sustained the relation of a minister to your parents and family, I should have declined the task. But having at the call of friendship complied with your request, I cheerfully presume upon your candor, and that of all my Reverend Brethren, and respectable auditors, while I endeavour to explain and enforce that view of the ministerial office which St. Paul gives us,

I Cor. III. 8, 9.

HE THAT PLANTETH AND HE THAT WATER-
ETH ARE ONE, AND EVERY MAN SHALL RE-
CEIVE HIS OWN REWARD, ACCORDING TO HIS
OWN LABOUR; FOR WE ARE LABOURERS TO-
GETHER WITH GOD.

THE leading design of the Apostle, in this chapter, was to suppress a contentious and dangerous spirit, which began to prevail in the Corinthian Church. "Whereas there is amongst you envying, and strife, and divisions, and one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, *are ye not carnal?*" do ye not act upon low and earthly principles? "*and walk as men?*" resembling the heathens who rank themselves under the names of their different philosophers, orators, and teachers? The Apostle disclaims such distinctions with an honest freedom, and upon the best ground: for says he, "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whose means ye have believed, according as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is
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he that planteth, any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

THUS far the Apostle's reproofs relate to the conduct of the people towards their ministers; from whence he passes, by a most easy transition, to the office and duties of the ministry itself; which are represented in the text under very natural, and obvious, though figurative expressions.

I. GIVE me leave, my friend and brother, to observe that our appointment and business as ministers of Jesus Christ, is to plant and water his church: *He that planteth and he that watereth*. When I speak of the church as the subject of this attention and labour, it is on the express authority of the Apostle, who immediately adds, to the Christian Church at Corinth, *Ye are God's Husbandry*. The margin reads it, Tillage. The original signifies a cultivated field. Such was the Corinthian Church. Such on the same principles is every other christian society. Such is the Church of Christ in general. It is the design of the ministerial office, to plant and water this field;

field ; and the duty of each of us in particular, to cultivate and improve those religious societies with which we are immediately connected. A more important, honourable, arduous, and yet delightful employment was never committed to men. Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, and even Christ himself have gone before us in this occupation, and given a dignity to it which can never be diminished. This trust is now descended from inspired persons, to pastors and teachers, who are to succeed each other to the end of time. To this order of men you, Sir, have the honour to belong ; having been educated for the christian ministry, for some years engaged in it, and having now, solemnly and publicly avowed your choice, and devoted yourself to this office ; that, according to your best ability, you may promote the wise and benevolent designs of the gospel, and the highest interests of mankind. And in this view, my dear friend, how shall we better learn what we ought to be and do, than by considering the character and conduct of our venerable predecessors ? “I have planted, Apollos watered.” If we, or any modern ministers, have deviated

deviated from the spirit, usefulness, and dignity of our appointment, this is the way to recover them, and to form and direct those who are engaging in this work.

WHEN Paul is said to have planted, I believe it is generally understood to refer to his preaching the gospel amongst those who were strangers to it, converting men from Paganism or Judaism, and then forming his converts into churches. In this respect, the labours of Paul were abundant, and his success extraordinary. He travelled through extensive regions of heathenism, planted and cultivated that barren soil, with the truths and principles of the christian religion, which were suited to produce the best and noblest fruits of virtue, holiness and happiness. In a few years, he saw rising round him many fair and flourishing plantations. In the language of the prophet, *the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose; the desolate land was tilled and became like Eden, and the wilderness like the garden of God.* Particularly, a flourishing church rose at Corinth, under the Apostle's culture, which encouraged him to continue a year and
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fix months, teaching the word of God amongst them. With the utmost propriety might he say, *I have planted.*

APOLLOS is said *to have watered* what Paul had planted. He was a Jew of Alexandria, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures;" and when he was "instructed in the way of the Lord," in the religion of Christ, being fervent in spirit, "he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, and helped much them that had believed this grace, and mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures (of the Old Testament) that Jesus was the Christ." When it is said Apollos watered, some think this refers to his having baptised the converts which Paul had made. And indeed it is observable, that Paul declares he was not sent to baptise, but to preach the 'gospel. 1 Cor. i. 7. This, therefore, might be included, but is by no means the compleat idea of watering the church; nor did the labours of Apollos end here; for he taught diligently the things of the Lord, helped them that had believed,

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confirmed them in the faith, profession, practice and hope of the gospel.

SUCH was the office of the primitive preachers. And still, I presume, faithful ministers may be considered as succeeding them in this work:—Particularly, those who are employed by providence in spreading the gospel where it has not yet reached, making profelytes to the christian faith, gathering them together in the public profession of christianity, encouraging them to assemble “with one accord in one place, and to continue steadfast in the Apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers,” may be said to have planted:—And further, where by the blessing of God upon our ministerial labours, we are enabled in any instances to awaken the careless and inconsiderate, to bring sinners to repentance, “to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and make ready a people prepared for the Lord, adding to the church such as shall be saved:”—Or where by our wise and serious endeavours amongst the younger part of our hearers, we are so happy as to make the first impressions of religion, to en-
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gage them on the side of virtue and piety, that "instead of the fathers, there may be the children, as a seed to serve God, to be accounted to him for a generation," and to provide for the future prosperity of the church:— In these cases, christian ministers may be said to have *planted*.

AND, Sir, when we enter, as most of us have done, into the labours of others, and find churches formed, plantations laid out, and believers settled in the faith and profession of the gospel—then, our pious and benevolent endeavours to increase the knowledge, improve the principles, and strengthen and mature the virtues of christians; to cause those *who are planted in the house of the Lord to flourish in the courts of our God, and to bring forth fruit even to old age—all our labours, to make them like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, whose leaf does not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper—all that we do to make "the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," may be truly considered as watering the church of God. The metaphors*
here

here used, instead of being forced and unnatural, are highly just and beautiful, and have been relished and imitated by the best writers. One of our own descriptive poets, when painting the moral culture of the mind, dwells with propriety and pleasure on the images of the text.

Delightful task, *to rear* the tender thought,
 To teach the young idea how to *shoot*,
 To *pour* the fresh instruction o'er the mind,
 To breathe th' enlivening spirit, and *to plant*
 The generous purpose in the glowing breast.

THOMSON'S SPRING.

THIS, Sir, is the business of a christian minister. He is to dress and cultivate a moral field; to extirpate whatever is useless or pernicious; error, prejudice, passion, appetite and vice; to improve the soil, and plant, and water those seeds of truth and virtue, peace and charity, hope and joy, which will be productive of the most valuable and perfect fruits that the heart and life can yield. For this purpose, you, my dear friend and brother, have been chosen by this christian society. I intreat you, therefore, to preserve
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upon your mind a constant and lively sense of this great obligation ; and that you cannot possibly have any concern in this world, equal to that of filling up this important post with fidelity, diligence, honour and success. This is the sphere wherein you are to move, the field of activity and usefulness in which you are to exert yourself. By this work you are to form and perfect your character, as a servant of God, a minister of Jesus, and a warm friend to mankind. In this employment you are to find your best satisfactions, to taste your purest and most elevated pleasures, to give scope to all your natural and acquired abilities, to improve your various talents, and to perform your vows which you have this day made, that you may be accepted of God and approved of men. No man can deserve the name of a christian minister who does not conscientiously engage in these services ; yet those who presume most upon the honour of succeeding the Apostles, and who obtain, in all countries, the highest ecclesiastical dignities and emoluments, often do the least in this great business of planting and watering God's field.

II. FROM

II. FROM the view here given of the primitive ministers, one being qualified and employed to *plant*, and another to *water*, we may take notice of the wise, needful, and beautiful diversity which then took place, and does still prevail in the christian ministry. It appears to have been the design of providence, that the extraordinary endowments, and the natural abilities, and dispositions of christian ministers, should be exceedingly various, to accommodate them more extensively to the service of the church.

WITH respect to *supernatural advantages*, we are informed, that “to one was given the word of wisdom, to another the gift of healing, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits, to another divers tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues, to another working of miracles,” [1 Cor. xii. 8—10.] “God bearing witness to the truth of his word by signs and wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.”

AND with respect to *natural ability and disposition*,

position, the difference was as observable. Peter was bold and vehement: John mild and gentle: Paul zealous, affectionate, indefatigable. Some of the first preachers were learned, and some unlettered men. Apollos was eloquent: Barnabas was a son of consolation: Boanerges a son of thunder. Some were qualified to plant the gospel, to lay the foundations of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; others to lead the believers on to perfection. Some were fitted to give milk to babes, and others meat to strong men. "Having then, says the Apostle, *gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us*, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." This variety in the primitive church was doubtless a wise and beneficial appointment; yet we find it was liable to abuse, and was in fact made the occasion of setting up one minister against another, one saying, I am of Paul, another, I am of Apollos, thus creating divisions in the church.

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THE age of supernatural gifts is long since passed; but still there is a great diversity observable, in the genius, taste, talents, studies, attainments and labours of ministers, which tends to render the institution more extensively useful. Some are more eminently furnished for one service to the church, and some for another. Some to rouse and alarm the conscience, some to cherish good impressions, keep alive virtuous purposes, warn christians of their dangers, excite them to humility and watchfulness, and a careful use of the means of virtue. Some are plain practical preachers, others regular convincing reasoners, others eloquent persuasive pleaders. Some more eminently versed in antient languages, and capable of a critical examination of the original records. Others expert at solving difficulties, and rectifying errors which must occur in a volume handed down by so many persons, through so many ages. Others knowing themselves "set as it were for the defence of the gospel," are prepared to refute the cavils, and reply to the objections of its adversaries, "in meekness instructing those that oppose," or with seasonable and forcible argu-

ment "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men," supporting the common faith, and preserving the unwary from the contagion of infidelity.

As the church stands in need of these various services, and no man can be equal to the whole, it has always pleased God to supply its wants, by raising up persons qualified for such exertions, by natural abilities, different course of education, by early advantages more favourable to some enquiries and attainments than others, by a great diversity of circumstances connections and stations in life, and many secret disposals of providence, tending to determine mens views, and fix their governing pursuits and habits. And did the christian world wisely attend to the utility of this appointment, it would lay a just foundation for thankfulness to God, and for candor and respect to all worthy and good men in the ministry, however they may differ from one another.

III. AMIDST this variety in the primitive church, the text informs us there was the strictest

strictest and most desirable union. "He that planteth and he that watereth *are one*." Thus it was when the spirit of our religion was understood and felt; and thus, my dear Sir, it should be through every age. Happy were the times, when this could be asserted in its full extent, and prevailed in its genuine influence! We are *one*, my Reverend Brethren, in the authority by which we act. *One is our master, even Christ, and all we are brethren*. Nor are we allowed to call any man master or father upon earth. Our instructions are drawn from one inspired code, to which we are all to confine ourselves without knowingly adding or diminishing. Our abilities, talents, and stations of service are derived from one divine source, the providence and spirit of God. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; differences of administration, but the same Lord; diversities of operation, but it is the same God which worketh all in all," 1 Cor. xii. 4—6. Our distinctions are indeed now to be obtained chiefly by the use of natural means: yet our different intellectual capacities are as immediately from God the father of our spirits, as our natures are; and could

we take a view of the workings of providence, which have contributed to our improvement in different studies, directed us to particular researches, procured for us advantages, encouragements, books, friends, health, spirits and means necessary for our progress;—and especially could we observe those influences of the divine spirit, which have succeeded more or less our inquiries and endeavours, and helped us to form a christian, and a ministerial temper and character;—these views would induce modest men to acknowledge, that those who plant and those who water are one, alike indebted to the providence and grace of God, which have furnished them with their respective talents.

WE are also *one* as to the end and design of our appointment; which is, singly, to promote knowledge, virtue, piety, and happiness; the honour of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of the souls of men. The noble aim of all our ministrations, is *the perfecting of the saints, the edifying of the body of Christ, till we, and our hearers, all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of*
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the Son of God, unto perfect men, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. The services and designs of good ministers are so similar and uniform, that they may justly be expected to co-operate as much as possible with each other, and be firmly united in pursuit of them.—This leads me to observe once more,

THAT ministers are and should be *one*, in esteem, affection and harmony. They should, my dear Brother, be cordial friends to each other, united in respect and love, for their master's and their work's sake. They should rejoice in each others acceptance and success, and be infinitely above the little jealousies, envyings, and competitions which have sometimes disturbed their peace, hindered their usefulness, and disgraced their characters. Of all others, ministers are most bound to "love as brethren." Embarked as we are in one glorious cause amidst many worldly disadvantages, we ought certainly to assist, support and comfort one another. It is shocking to see such brethren "falling out by the way," and increasing the unavoidable difficulties of their

office, by mutual contentions and animosities. There is nothing in our religion, or our ministry to divide us, but the strongest motives of union. There is room and work enough in God's field, for the exertion of our united talents and abilities. *The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you; those members which seem to be feeble are necessary.* Ministers of the most shining accomplishments, are not always the most useful. Those who possess the fewest distinctions, or fill the lowest stations, if they discover due degrees of diligence and humility, may be favoured by the great head of the church with equal success. Harmony and union therefore amidst all external diversity, is in our profession exceedingly becoming; *it is like the dew of Hermon, or that which descended upon the mountains of Zion.* Be it your ambition and pleasure, my dear friend and brother, always to live, as you have hitherto done, in the strictest friendship, honour, affection and confidence, with your worthy colleague in the service of this respectable society. Let it be seen *that he that planteth and he that watereth are one.* Seek to advance

vance each others reputation, peace, comfort and success, striving together in your prayers for one another, that the relation you sustain to this church and to each other, may be attended with improving satisfaction and complacency; that it may appear you have one common interest, and no other contention, than who shall most effectually promote it.

IV. IN this account of the primitive ministers, we read, that they were *labourers together with God*. It ought to have been translated *fellow labourers of God*.

THERE is indeed a true and proper sense in which ministers may be said to work together with God, and the Apostle suggests that very idea in the context, when he informs us that ministers plant and water, and God so far co-operates with them *as to give the increase*. Thus they are labourers together with God. Nevertheless the true construction of these words is, that we are *labourers together of God*, fellow servants of the same Lord. And it had been happy for the church, if its ministers had always preserved this just, benevolent,

volent, and modest sentiment: but man though weak is aspiring, striving for mastery, like *Diotrephes fond of the pre-eminence*. Our blessed Lord was obliged to check this spirit in the little circle of his disciples. *Be not ye called Rabbi, neither be ye called master: but he that is greatest amongst you, let him be your servant*. Surely therefore, they should be contented with being, what the text represents them, *fellow servants*. We may hold different stations in the church, and move in more extended, or more contracted spheres: but certainly, my brethren, we are all upon an equality; excepting only, that *with brotherly love, in honour we are to prefer one another*.

FURTHER, it is observable that the text considers ministers as *labourers*; *we are labourers together with God*. *Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour*. This, my dear brother, is also a very instructive view of the character we have assumed. It is given to ministers, not only by St. Paul, but by our blessed Lord himself. *The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he*
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would send forth labourers into his harvest. The employment of husbandry, in all its process, is known to be a laborious and most useful occupation. When therefore the inspired writers compare the ministry to that, they certainly do not consider it as an easy, indolent, unprofitable life: though it is to be feared that many in all communions make it such, and on account of the prospect of ease and leisure, are induced perhaps to embrace it. But, assuredly, all such abuse it; they forget the primitive and most respectable view of it, overlook the main end of the appointment, and wear the name, without the spirit, of a minister of Jesus Christ. Whoever will set himself conscientiously to perform the duties of this office, will find it truly laborious; and perhaps will be induced to acknowledge, that there are few stations in life, which call for more strenuous exertion of the faculties, if not of body, yet certainly of mind; the assiduous application of which, does more to exhaust the spirits, and impair the constitution, than an equal degree of bodily labour. If therefore the ministry is at any time made an employment of ease and indolence, it must be by
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the total, or partial neglect, of many of its important and incumbent duties. I may venture to appeal to all my Reverend Brethren, whether a serious, attentive, faithful minister will not find his labours considerable, nay whether in this view, he may not say, *Who is sufficient for these things?* St. Paul declares of himself that he was “in *labours* more abundant.” He speaks of those that “*labour* in word and doctrine :” and commands the churches to “know them that *labour* amongst them.” In all things we are to approve ourselves ministers of God, “in *labours*, in watchings, in prayers, serving God with all humility of mind, ceasing not to warn every man and teach every man, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Timothy is commanded to “give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine; to meditate on divine things, and give himself wholly to them, that his profiting might appear to all; and to study to shew himself approved unto God, *a workman* that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” “I charge thee,” says the great Apostle, “before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the
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the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, *preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.* Watch thou in all things, endure affliction, *do the work* of an Evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

SUCH views, my dear brother, of the office we have undertaken are solemn and affecting; they make it evident that the christian ministry is an arduous occupation. And surely, Sir, if a minister be duly concerned to store his mind with knowledge and learning, human and divine; if he is studious to understand the evidences of that revelation, which he is to explain and recommend; and acquaint himself with the nature and design of the sacred volume, that he may remove difficulties, resolve doubts, convince gainfayers, and be able to "render a reason to every one that enquireth concerning the hope that is in him:"—if he is solicitous to settle his principles in a manner agreeable to reason and scripture, on the most important controversies which have agitated the christian world:—if, like Apollos, he wishes to be mighty in the scriptures, able
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and apt to teach:—if he is emulous to provide for his people solid, judicious, edifying discourses on the great branches of natural and revealed religion, suited to enlighten the judgment, affect the conscience, and reform the lives of men, feeding the flock with knowledge and understanding; he will find employment for his time and abilities. If he studies to lead and animate the devotions of his people in their public prayers and praises, to perform these services with understanding and spirit, with copiousness and propriety, with fervour and acceptance from sabbath to sabbath; it will be necessary for him to be much in the exercise of meditation and prayer in his own retirements, that his mind may not only be furnished with materials, but invigorated with the spirit of devotion. And if he not only engages in the public ministrations of the gospel according to his best ability, but attends to other duties of his office; if he cultivates “that pure and undefiled religion” which will dispose and prepare him to visit the poor, the sick, the widow and fatherless in their affliction, and alleviate the distresses of those around him; if he endeavours by his
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personal intercourse, as well as his public services, *to confirm the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and teaching the afflicted that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (Acts xiv. 22.);—if he is also careful, as you, Sir, are very sensible a minister ought to be, to shew himself *an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, taking heed to himself, to his doctrine, and to all the flock:*—if these are his conscientious endeavours, he will certainly find the christian ministry neither easy nor indolent; he will not be an unprofitable member of the community, but a worthy and useful servant of the public, and of the highest interests of men. More especially, my dear brother, if a minister pays due attention, not only to his outward conduct in life, that the ministry may not be blamed, but to his own heart, that he may imbibe the noblest principles of action, purify and exalt his affections, and bring his mind under the governing influence of the religion he dispenses to others; if he takes care to keep alive and vigorous in his own breast, a supreme regard
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for the blessed God, an affectionate gratitude to Jesus Christ, fervent charity for the souls of men, and tender, strong attachments to those who have committed their spiritual interests to his trust; if he considers himself in his true connexion with his people, as their appointed instructor, monitor, friend and comforter; chosen by them to make christianity appear easy to their understandings, and amiable to their hearts, to lead them into such an acquaintance with it, that they may venerate and esteem it above all earthly possessions, live by its precepts, and be prepared to die under its influence, and partake of its final blessedness:—If a minister studies to fill up such a character as this, he will find it, as to himself, an appointment of labour; and, whatever the worldly and profane may say, such persons in their several stations, *are the lights of the world, the salt of the earth, the servants of the most high God, holding forth the word of life, and shewing to men the way of salvation.*

V. ALL good ministers have exceeding great encouragement to animate them to these endeavours,

endeavours, from the assurance given them in the text, *that every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.* This implies,

I. THAT ministers should expect, *as such*, to undergo an impartial examination and trial, that the rewards due to them in that solemn character, may be exactly and finally adjusted. Yes, my dear brother, we are all accountable for the office we sustain, and must in a little while pass a public scrutiny, not only as men, not merely as christians, but as ministers of Jesus Christ. We must give an account of this stewardship of the manifold grace of God, that it may appear how we have discharged the trust reposed in us, improved our talents, and respective opportunities for usefulness. We are informed by the Apostle *that we are to watch for souls, as those that must give an account*, and our grand concern should be *that we may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that would be unprofitable to our people, and ruinous to ourselves.* Heb. xiii. 17. In the view of that day we must therefore conduct all our ministrations, keeping back

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nothing from our hearers which is proper to be communicated to them, "not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, that we may keep ourselves pure from the blood of all men; that whether they hear, or whether they forbear, we may deliver our own souls."

2. WHEN it is said, *every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour*; this may imply that he shall be rewarded agreeable to *the nature* of his labour. It is, my dear brother, a solemn reflection that a minister may be studious, diligent and laborious, and yet be entitled to little or no recompense, for want of employing himself in those duties which would render him most serviceable to the cause of Christ, and to the souls of men. A man of education and taste may easily contract a habit of literary application, and be assiduous in pursuit of a favourite science, the acquisition of which may terminate chiefly in his own honour, emolument, or gratification. Others may accumulate a great deal of knowledge, which while they live may lie concealed and useless, and when they die, may die with them, without making the world wiser

wiser or better. Ministers may labour more than is necessary in the ornament and polish of their compositions, tending to weaken rather than give force to their addresses, and mispending much important time. They may labour to propagate and establish their own speculative opinions, and conjectures on subjects of small importance, or doubtful disputation, thus striving to make converts to their own errors and prejudices, more than to the plain and momentous truths of the gospel. They may labour to advance the interest of a party, instead of the general interest and union of the christian church. They may study to set off their discourses with false and affected oratory, with violent, theatrical attitudes, action, and utterance, and all "the enticing words of man's wisdom," instead of "that which the Holy Ghost teacheth." But as these are arts by which men often court a vain popularity, rather than the honour of God, they may justly apprehend that final decision, *Verily I say unto you, ye have your reward.* It therefore becomes ministers to take care, first, that they hold the foundation, and then, how and what they build upon it. For, as the Apostle

asserts in immediate connexion with the text, *If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, or, on the contrary, wood, hay, and stubble, he must expect his reward according to the nature of his work ; because every man's work shall be made manifest ; for the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. And if a man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward : but if any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss : yet if he has been a sincere, though a mistaken man, he himself shall be saved, but so as by fire.* Thus it appears, that ministers are to be recompensed according to the nature of their work. So long, therefore, as we adhere to the genuine doctrines of scripture, not handling the word of God deceitfully, taking care that we do not corrupt it by any foreign mixtures, or conceal, or misrepresent it, through mean compliances, for any worldly ends ; so far as we labour to build upon the firm foundation of evangelical principles, the fair and noble superstructure of virtue and holiness, peace and charity ; we may modestly and reasonably hope to be rewarded according to the nature of our work.

3. *Every*

3. *Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour; or in proportion to his fidelity, diligence and zeal in executing this great trust. All ministers cannot indeed labour alike. They have not equal degrees of health, strength, spirits, natural activity, or providential advantages. Some have more leisure from the care of families, or the anxieties and necessities of life, than others. For all these, and many other differences, the master we serve will make equitable allowance, and will only expect from us an improvement proportioned to our talents. But, my dear brother, when these advantages or disadvantages are adjusted, by that unerring Being, who divides to every man severally as he will, then the minister who sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that sows bountifully, shall reap bountifully. The God whom we serve "will not be unrighteous to forget our work of faith, or labour of love, in that we have ministered to his saints, or do minister:" every sincere endeavour in which we engage, private or public, to fulfil the designs of the ministry, will enhance our future recompense and brighten our crown.*

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4. **THOUGH** it is declared, *that every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour*; from whence it becomes evident that the more a minister exerts himself, the more shall he be distinguished: yet we cannot from hence infer that there shall be a strict and absolute proportion between our services, in themselves considered, and the future rewards of the gospel. No, my dear sir, the recompense of faithful ministers will abundantly exceed, not only all our labours and deserts, but our highest conceptions.

THERE is much pleasure to be found *at present*, from an upright discharge of the duties of our station. The thought of being employed to carry on the noblest purposes of divine wisdom and mercy to a sinful world, and being made instrumental to save ourselves and them that hear us; cannot but open a spring of pure satisfaction, to a pious and benevolent mind. Nor is it an inconsiderable consolation to think, that the seeds we are endeavouring to plant and water in the church of God, may perhaps rise up, and bear the fruits

fruits of virtue, piety, and happiness, when we are laid in the dust.

BUT how liberal, unbounded, and god-like are the promises which respect *the future recompense* of all good ministers! *They that are wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Who is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make a ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

It is also a great encouragement to ministers, that their final acceptance and reward do not depend upon their success with mankind, but upon their own diligence and fidelity. Though we should have reason to say, *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* Yea, though we should say, *I have laboured in vain and spent my strength for nought: yet*
surely

surely our judgment is with the Lord, and our work with our God. Every man is to receive his own reward *according to his own labour*, not according to the capricious views, and uncertain dispositions of men. If, therefore, we are upright and pious in our aims, and diligent, humble and zealous in our endeavours; “though Israel be not gathered, yet shall we be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and our God shall be our strength:” for says the Apostle, “We are a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.”

THUS have I endeavoured to illustrate the leading sentiments of the passage before us; and now, my dear brother, shall only detain your attention to the following obvious and important inferences.

1. As it will be the business of your life and labours to improve your hearers in the knowledge and practice of religion, it must also be your great and serious concern, *that while you water others, you may be watered also yourself*:—that you may continually improve in the principles and virtues you inculcate. You must be sensible, Sir, that ministers are in danger of overlooking themselves,
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even in their most zealous addressees to others. An habitual converse with divine things may, if we are not upon our guard, make them too familiar, and abate their influence upon our own minds. We should therefore frequently admit the reflection, that we are preaching to ourselves, and are at least as deeply concerned in the message we bear as others; nay, in some respects more forcibly obliged by the precepts and prohibitions, which we ourselves, under so many solemn circumstances, announce. *Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* We should apply every thing as much as possible to our own hearts, "lest having preached to others we ourselves should be cast-aways." Our Lord prayed, concerning the first ministers of his kingdom, that "they might be sanctified, through the truth," they were to deliver to the world. And the Apostle says, "all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself, and committed to us the ministry of reconciliation;" first reconciled us, and then entrusted us with the great charge of negotiating the embassy of reconciliation.

2. SINCE we are labourers *of God*, whose
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whole success is ascribed to the divine concurrence—I have planted, Appollos watered, but God gave the increase; so then, he that planteth is nothing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase;—it hence becomes the duty of all christian ministers, to live in a constant and devout dependence on the blessing of God, and earnestly and humbly to implore his assistance and grace, to crown their best endeavours. This, my dear brother, has been the immediate and most important business of this solemn day. And nothing can be more rational, or scriptural, than such acknowledgments of our need of the divine benediction. Cheerfully hoping that these prayers will be abundantly answered; that these services may quicken us all in the duties of our stations; and that your people, assisted in their way to eternal life by your ministry and example, will be your hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus—“We commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ.” Amen.

T H E E N D.

